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DEPT FOR AF A/S FRAZER, SE WILLIAMSON, AF/SPG
NSC FOR PITTMAN AND HUDSON
ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU
DEPT PLS PASS USAID FOR AFR/SUDAN

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: THE BRITISH AND FRENCH WILL SAVE BASHIR?

11. (U) SUMMARY: An article published by Alex Duval in the September 14 edition of The Guardian (UK) entitled "British efforts to block the ICC indictment of President Al-Bashir" has emboldened the

state-influenced press of Khartoum. The article made front-page news September 15 and 16, with a number of Khartoum-based editorials extolling the "surprising turn of events" brought about by the UK and France, taking note that these governments are now allegedly "backing the moves of Libya, the Arab League, and several African countries." END SUMMARY.

12. (U) On September 16, Sudan Vision, a pro-government English language daily, ran a commentary article entitled "The ICC Countdown" in which the author stated the alleged British and French support for stopping the ICC's indictment of President Bashir was "an unexpected endorsement" of the Sudanese government. Concluding the piece, the columnist wrote "finally the issue of justice versus stability and peace is being put on the table. It is no longer an academic exercise... now things are being seen under a different light."

13. (U) Al-Ahdath, a pro-government Arabic language daily, also published a column on the subject, claiming "a story like this, printed in two major press publications, is most likely to be true." The piece did "question the motives behind the U.K. and France," however, postulating that the story was "intended as a test balloon by the governments of Britain and France."

14. (U) Al-Ayam, an independent daily, also ran a commentary on the supposed new Anglo-French stance, asking "what does it all mean?" In the column, the paper claimed the move to be "a strategic tactic" by the two countries, which have "realized that the ICC case will impede the peace process in Sudan." The author continued that "Britain and France will come up with a deal... in return for their support for President Bashir, there will be house arrests or trials for Haroun and Kushayb, and international observers may come to Sudan to assist the judicial committee investigating war crimes in Darfur." Concluding the piece, the paper claimed, without further clarification, that "this new deal will be conveyed by the U.S. administration through Special Envoy Richard Williamson."

15. (U) Giving a hint of balance to the coverage was Akhbar Al-yom, which had a feature article on its front page entitled "News and Secrets." In the article, it wrote that the Sudanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs was "requesting its Missions in London and Paris to look into the speculations" and quoted MFA Spokesman Ali Al-Sadig as saying he "could not confirm... the British stance but had contacted the concerned parties in both countries requesting a clarification on their latest stance."

16. (SBU) COMMENT: Delusional at best, the Sudanese regime and the Khartoum press corps seem to be grabbing at straws for any way out of the ICC indictment although this time they seem to have had help in the presumably more responsible UK quality press. This latest round of coverage comes after last week's claim that "China would step in" to block the indictment with a veto, something that is not

even technically possible (this week, the media has backed down on this idea.) Media attention to the ICC issue as a tool of the regime to put pressure on the West (and propose possible solutions) will likely increase during the UN General Assembly meeting next week.

FERNANDEZ